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**Pedagogical documentation as a lens for examining equality in early childhood education**

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# **Pedagogical documentation as a lens for examining equality in early childhood education**

In this paper, we consider pedagogical quality particularly as equal opportunities for participating in decision making in preschool. Relying on Ferraris' (2013) theory of Documentality, we demonstrate how pedagogical documentation can contribute to understanding children's perspectives and discuss how it may help facilitate children's perspectives to become part of their everyday lives at preschool. In addition, we examine, using a multi method approach, how our conceptualizations help critically examine equality in early childhood education. The study was conducted in Finnish preschools. The data source for this study is comprised of the researcher's observation diary, self-documentation conducted by teachers (n=13), individual ECE plans of 104 2-7-year-old children and document-aided interviews with their teachers (n=13). Finally, we critically discuss the consequences of our findings in terms of documentation, pedagogy and the equality of ECE.

Keywords: pedagogical documentation; equality; quality

## **Introduction**

The importance of quality early childhood education (ECE) has been widely recognized (OECD, 2012) yet, vague conceptualizations of quality have also been criticized. Definitions of 'quality' are based on values and beliefs about a good society and the nature of childhood. It seems that most contemporary conceptualizations of quality in

ECE and the models used in evaluation draw heavily on children's developmental outcomes and present quality as an opaque imperative; thus, they fail to acknowledge the political aspects of the meaning of quality in ECE (Fenech, 2011; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008; Moss, Dahlberg & Pence, 2000).

The increased use of opaque concepts such as quality can be seen as a sign of the depoliticisation of ECE. Quality is presented as imperative even though its meaning is unclear. Thus, there is a need to make spaces for various kinds of democratic practices in ECE contexts (Moss, 2007). Early childhood institutions are central to the everyday lives of the children and adults who participate in them; in fact, they provide an excellent platform for the formation of democratic space. For example, they both build up children's capabilities for participation and make their perspectives count. Therefore, a more nuanced discourse on quality ECE, would focus on perspectives of equality.

One approach for enhancing equality in ECE settings is the aim to understand better every child's perspective (Sommer et al., 2010) and the ways in which children communicate them (Kumpulainen, Lipponen, Hilppö & Mikkola, 2014). While there has been strong interest in these issues in both research and practice, it has also been pointed out that the new pedagogy of participation may be silencing specific groups of children (Vandenbroek & Bouverne-de-bie, 2006). It has been noticed that especially children with disabilities or special needs do not have opportunities to participate in day-to-day practices and decision making (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014).

Foregrounding young children's perspectives requires methods for making them visible. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in how taking notes, photos, and videos can advance pedagogical practices in ECE and help educators acknowledge children's perspectives as a vital part of different ECE practices (Carr & Lee, 2012;

Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Alasuutari, Markström & Vallberg-Roth, 2014). This area of work is referred to as pedagogical documentation. The aim of documentation is to make both pedagogical practices and children's perspectives visible and open for reflection.

In Finland, as in the other Nordic countries, children's perspective is rooted in curricula. That is, children are often positioned as active participants with rights to influence their daily lives in ECE (Sommer et al., 2010). Even though children's perspectives have been stressed in many contexts and the idea of pedagogical documentation has been widely adopted (see Kalliala & Pramling, 2014), it is not clear whether children's perspectives have an impact on ECE practices. For example, children are often not involved in compiling their own progress records and lack of involvement has made them sad (Garrick et al., 2010; see also, Rosen, 2010). Others have also noticed that even if the views of the children were sought while formulating individual ECE plans in cooperation with teachers and parents, the plans may have been disregarded or the children's view's refuted (Alasuutari & Karila, 2010).

In this study, which relies on Ferraris' (2013) ontological theory of 'social' that is called Documentality, we demonstrate how pedagogical documentation can contribute to understanding children's perspectives. We aim to show what the preconditions for pedagogical documentation are to ensure that children's perspectives become part of everyday life in preschool. To this end, we ask: (1) what is the current role of pedagogical documentation in the formation of shared social practices in Finnish preschools and (2) what kind of practices facilitate the formation of shared social practices? Then, in order to understand whose perspectives are being heard, we ask: (3) is there a connection between children's gender and how their perspectives are taken

into account in their ECE plans and (4) is there a connection between children's need for special care and how their perspectives are taken into account in their ECE plans?

We first introduce the conceptual framework of our study. Second, we present our research initiative located in Finnish ECE. We then demonstrate how our framework enabled us to explore equality in everyday life in Finnish preschools. Finally, we discuss the consequences of our analysis in terms of documentation, pedagogy and the equality of ECE.

### **Pedagogical documentation as an attempt to construct social reality**

We approach pedagogical documentation through Ferraris' theory of Documentality (2013). In previous research, documentality has been applied in understanding the role of pedagogical documentation and assessment in transitions from home care to pre-school (Rintakorpi, Lipponen & Reunamo, 2014) and in examining whether the documents prepared in ECE have any institutional value (Alasuutari, Markström & Vallberg-Roth, 2014). In this paper, we apply Ferraris' (2013) concepts of regulative and constitutive objects to examine the very foundations of pedagogical documents.

According to Ferraris (2013), documents have a central position within the sphere of social reality. Ferraris (2013) argues that social reality consists of social objects, i.e., inscribed acts. In this context inscribed means that acts are based on a shared trace: a text or trace in a memory. Material traces are necessary, but not sufficient elements of inscriptions. The necessary condition for inscription is that it is accessible to at least two people; therefore, it has to have social significance. The concept of inscription contains the idea that inscriptions lead to action; trace becomes inscription actualized through action. That is, inscriptions have performative power. For example, a social object may contain default standards for the actors, a setting and a

sequence of events that are expected to occur in a particular situation. Social objects are not stable and fixed but rather dynamic as they come into being through acts situated in a certain time and space (Ferraris, 2013).

In terms of pedagogical documentation, an inscription could be a picture, a transcribed interview or a recorded observation that leads to an action. A child's drawing of a Star Wars character and notes written beside a drawing about her interest in Lego Star Wars YouTube animations which then leads to an animation project can be thought of as an inscription. Pedagogical documentation allows for inscriptions to emerge, but is not a necessarily a pre-condition for it.

Ferraris (2013) divides social objects into two categories: regulative and constitutive. Regulative objects aim to control existing social conduct. Even if a regulative object ceased to exist, the social conduct that it regulates, would continue existing. For example, playground rules are regulative objects. They regulate play and activities at a playground. However, if the rules ceased to exist, play itself and other activities would continue.

Constitutive objects differ from regulative ones. Constitutive objects bring into being something that would not exist without them (Ferraris, 2013). A card games is an example of a constitutive object. Without the rules of a card game, the game would not exist even though the cards would still be there. Imaginative characters created in play would also be constitutive objects. If all the inscriptions related to imaginative character—the memories, stories and pictures related to it—were eliminated, the imaginative character would no longer exist.

By using the differentiation between regulative and constitutive objects, we can illuminate the role of pedagogical documentation in enabling children's perspectives to

become an essential part of everyday life in preschool. The next section will detail the methods and data we used to substantiate our argument.

## **Methods**

### ***Settings, participants and data***

Exploring the formation of social objects requires an ethnographically-oriented research methodology. In this study, we have applied observations and participatory methods (see Clark, 2005) to examine the formation of social objects between teachers and children.

The data source for this study is comprised of four parts: (1) the researcher's observation diary; (2) self-documentation conducted by teachers ( $n=13$ ); (3) document-aided interviews with these teachers ( $n=13$ ) and (4) individual ECE plans of 104 2-7-year-old children from their groups.

The observation study (researcher's observation diary) was set in a Finnish preschool group of 26 children (3-5 year olds) and four adults in the Helsinki district. It focused on a four-month period from May to August in 2014. Two of the group's staff members worked as preschool teachers. Two of the group's staff were nursery nurses. In this group, children had both personal portfolios and individual ECE plans. The observation data includes an observation diary, photos and documents such as schedules, lists, minutes of the meetings and memos that were related to the daily life and environment of the preschool.

Thirteen teachers from nine different preschools located in the same municipality where the observational study took place conducted self-documentation in May 2014. The teachers that volunteered for the study were asked to report their actions



during one working day. More specifically, they were asked to record what they did and who else was present (adults and children) in the situation.

The weekday for doing the self-observation was randomly selected for teachers beforehand but they could choose the actual day themselves. They were advised to select an ordinary day. We asked them to decide upon a date beforehand and not to change it except for an unplanned absence. We also asked them to provide the individual ECE plans of the children in their group. Individual ECE plans were selected for analysis since they are considered to function as a tool for planning and it is stated that they contain the perspective of the child, teacher and parents (National Institute for Health and Welfare 2007). Thus, they are expected to be potential platforms for the formation of social objects. Via the teachers, we also obtained parental permission to study the individual ECE plans and for the teachers to refer to the plans when discussing the self-documentation with the researcher. Each teacher in the group had a different way of conducting group level planning and not all of the group plans were in a written form in one specific place. The preschools were involved in updating their unit curricula at the time of generating the data. Although we discussed them during the interviews, it became clear that unit curricula did not govern the work of preschool at the time of this study.

Self-documentation and individual ECE plans were discussed with each teacher individually. We asked them to discuss the rationales informing their reported actions. More specifically, we inquired whether their conduct was based on a plan (individual ECE plan, group plan or other kind of plan), the tradition of the preschool, agreements made with the parents or with the children, or on something else. We also asked whether the agreements made in the individual plans created new practices and if the agreement was fulfilled. These document-aided interviews were audio recorded. The

interviews, self-documentations and the individual ECE plans served as a data source for addressing the first two questions of this paper. Individual ECE plans were also quantified in terms of the number of agreements made and whether the children's interests were referenced in the documents or the interview when discussing the agreements made. This information could be then connected to the information concerning children's gender, age and the need for special care. This quantitative data was used to address the paper's third and fourth questions.

### ***Data analysis***

To analyse our qualitative data, we first took a rough overview of all the observation diaries and audio files (document-elicited interviews) and made content logs, that is, a time-indexed summary of the content of the discussions (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Next, we selected episodes in which we identified evidence of the formation of shared social objects or discussion of pedagogical documentation. In these episodes it seemed that children or a child took part in defining tasks. These episodes focused both on the situations where they took part in making shared plans about future activities and how the children directed ongoing activities in interaction with an adult. In terms of audio files, the significant episodes were transcribed at this point. These episodes were analysed more closely to identify regularities in the data (Mitchell, 1984; Roth, 2005) and to ascertain how they resonated with the conceptual lens of regulative and constitutive objects.

In terms of quantitative data, descriptive analyses were conducted. To examine equality in terms of gender and the need for special care, the means of the number of agreements in which a child's perspective was directly referenced were compared among groups with the *Mann-Whitney U -test*. Nonparametric tests were conducted since the variables were not normally distributed.

## **Results**

In this section, we report the results in relation to the research questions set forth for this study. First, we will illuminate the current role of pedagogical documentation in the formation of social objects in our data. Second, we discuss what kind of practices facilitate the formation of a shared social object. Third, using both quantitative and qualitative data, we show that the concepts of ‘regulative’ and ‘constitutive objects’ may be used as a lens to examine equality in ECE practices. This is accomplished by answering questions about the connection between a child’s gender and the type of agreements made in his or her ECE plans and between a child’s need for special care and the type of agreements made in the ECE plans.

### ***Documentation as a medium for reporting and maintaining regulative objects***

Pedagogical documentation was used as a tool to build relationships with the parents, to guide them and share information with them and other partners; the documentation was intended to report existing practices; it did not serve as a planning tool.

This became evident not only when discussing individual ECE plans, but also when examining teachers’ diaries with them. Individual ECE plans were not specifically mentioned in the diaries, yet two of the teachers mentioned portfolios when they documented their day. The mentions were about a staff member gluing the pictures in the portfolios just before the summer break in order to get them ready before the holidays. One of the teachers reported that the observation day included sending digital pictures to parents via e-mail. Furthermore, during the observation period, the portfolios were discussed. The discussions concerned the lack of content of some portfolios and the lack of time for preparing the portfolios. The teachers noted that the children no

longer remembered the events in the pictures, since the children's views were not discussed right after the pictures were taken. Some of the pictures had been taken in autumn and they were still untouched in May. Thus, the staff felt that there was no point in doing the portfolios *with the children* even though that had been the original plan. It was evident that the pictures mainly reported existing practices. The portfolio was a nice souvenir that was later enjoyed by parents, children and staff; in some groups it served to build a close connection between adults and children. Even though it was evident that in some groups pedagogical documentation created a constitutive practice in which children and adults felt close and recognized, the content of the documentation did not provide any direct guideposts for planning.

The evidence showed that it was uncommon that children took part in the agreements made in the individual ECE plans. In fact, from the total number of 380 agreements made in the individual ECE plans, we could only identify 23 agreements in which children's opinions were referenced. Most commonly, it was generally mentioned that a child's opinions or preferences would be taken into account or that a teacher would support a child's expression of his or her opinion and viewpoint ( $n=8$ ). Teachers reported that seven of the agreements in which a child's opinion was mentioned, actually led to concrete changes in practices. They included allowing a child to help set the tables for lunch thus minimizing the waiting that he found frustrating as well as respecting and allowing a child to approach a fictional character that occasionally visited the children's group during the drama play at her own pace since she found the character scary. It was more common that children's interests were mentioned. However, these interests that were recorded did not directly lead to transformations in arrangements and everyday life in the preschool. Apparently, this was not the intention of the documents. In the interviews it became evident that teachers

considered these documents as tools for building relationships with and guiding the parents. They were also expected to be used to share information with other partners or report existing practices rather than as tools for planning as is illuminated in this interview excerpt.

Individual ECE plans seem to have the life of their own. Many members of our staff have the conversation with the parents just before the semester ends. They might transcribe the text during the summer break just before the child is transferred to the next group, so they do not have that kind of importance [planning]. However, this time, to my surprise, they were all done already.

The individual ECE plans were not meant to be plans per se even though the Finnish national curriculum guidelines suggest that as their main function. Five of the interviewees reported that they or their colleagues had not had time to write down some of the individual plans; therefore, they could not send them to us in the timeframe we had requested. In addition, it was not uncommon that the interviewee mentioned that they had not read the document after it had been written. If the document was written by another staff member, the teacher might have not seen the document at all before the interview.

However, there were agreements made in the individual ECE plans. Those agreements mainly concerned regulative objects and more specifically, how to maintain the existing ones. The agreements inscribed in the ECE plans were most often made if children did not fit into the institutional norms and therefore they were being encouraged to stop or reform certain ways of acting: biting, procrastinating when dressing, or preferring to play alone rather than with other children. In other words, there were existing social objects and more specifically, regulative objects: people

should not bite each other; children should dress in a certain amount of time and children should play with other children to develop their social skills and have friends.

Even though children's perspectives were not that visible in the individual ECE plans nor did the portfolios guide planning, we did find moments where children and adults seemed to form a social object together. We turn to this in the next section.

### ***Maintaining constitutive objects***

The first excerpt, demonstrating the formation of social object, has been selected from the researcher's observation diary. It shows a mutual attempt between 4-year-old Pauline and Maria, a child care worker as they form a social object.

Pauline is in the hall with her mum. She hands a drawing to Maria.

Pauline: Here are some guidelines for you Maria. I made them at home.

Mum: Well, weren't they more like suggestions?

Maria: Thank you Pauline! Let me see it. What a fine job you have done. Will you tell me about what kind of guidelines you have you made for me?

Pauline [pointing at the picture]: This is a kangaroo ball. It says: taking turns with a kangaroo ball. This means: warm water instead of cold water for the Little Dolphins. Do you remember when we had very cold water in water play? My hands were freezing!

Maria: Do you mean yesterday? I do remember that.

Pauline: And this is a ball with a cross over it. [It means] I don't like playing soccer.

Maria: Aha. But what if someone else does? Do you suggest that we won't play soccer at all? I don't think we can forbid others to play.

Pauline [thinks for a moment]: Well, it just means that I don't like playing soccer.

Maria: Well, I understand. It can be a bit rough sometimes. The boys are so speedy sometimes.

Pauline: Yhm. Can we take a kangaroo ball today?

Maria: What a fine idea! Let's do that. Listen, I am very glad you made these guidelines for me. When you come back from your summer holiday, I won't be here anymore, though. What would you say if we put this drawing here on the wall so that those adults who are going to be here then will see it as well?

Pauline: OK!

With the help of the drawing, Pauline makes suggestions concerning their daily life at the preschool: playing with a kangaroo ball, the temperature of the water in water play and her unwillingness to play soccer. Later in the day, Maria assured her that kangaroo balls were taken out for the children to use. She explained that it was because she remembered Pauline's suggestion. The water play did not take place on that day, which was also Pauline's last day at the preschool before the summer break, so the suggestion concerning the temperature of water was not relevant at that time. Most of the moments we identified in which children took part in defining social objects resembled Pauline's suggestion concerning a kangaroo ball; they were constitutive objects: they did not usually attempt to regulate existing social objects like Pauline's suggestion concerning the water temperature did. Usually it was an activity in which they had occasionally taken part before rather than something new.

Social objects identified from the data also had something else in common: they were usually not very durable. In the case presented above, the social object concerning the drawing and a kangaroo ball lasted just one day. When we returned from the

summer holidays, the drawing had been taken away from the wall and no one knew to which picture the researcher referred. In this case, however, the child care worker had earlier attempted to make the social object more durable by placing it on the wall. However, since no one else knew the meaning of the drawing on the wall, or the reason for its placement, someone removed it and they were not successful in making a lasting social object.

We did find that cooperatively formed social objects were more durable. One of the teachers reported an animation project that had been made together with 4–5-year-old children. She told us that the children were very interested in watching LEGO animations from YouTube at home. They suggested that they could watch them at preschool as well. Instead, the teacher suggested that they make an animation of their own. On the day the teacher conducted the self-observation they were in the middle of the process of cutting the video. When we unpacked the self-observation and the individual ECE plans with the teacher, the weeks-long project had ended after a movie festival with parents and children. In the next excerpt from the interview data, the teacher explains what it may require to keep a social object alive:

Eva: We have been very proud of the fact that our children have actively participated in the planning . . . The children [of our group] watched LEGO YouTube videos at home and they would have liked to do that here as well. We asked if they would like to create animations by themselves instead. We then made animations related to different topics. The children crafted the stories by themselves and made the set pieces as well.

. . .

Interviewer: Was it easy to carry out the project? Was there anything that interfered with it? Did it go smoothly?



Eva: Well, first of all, the project could not be conducted with the computers that the preschool had. I brought my own computer from home so that we could carry out the project. I felt that I was almost the only one in our team who had the skills to conduct this kind of project. Someone might have helped a bit from time to time, but I was tied to this one activity for the whole spring. These were the first thoughts that came to my mind. Otherwise, I think that it went on quite naturally; it was easy and fitted well into our everyday life in our group.

The teacher explained how they formed a social object together. The children had an interest in LEGO animations. It seems that the staff thought that watching LEGO animations did not meet the requirements they had for activities at preschool. However, the teacher found it important that the children were actively involved in making the videos together. Thus, the teacher reconstructed the social object that considered children as active agents, which has been a hegemonic view in Finnish ECE for a few years (Onnismaa, 2010). She aimed to take the children's interest into account and made a suggestion based on that combining it with her ideas about good quality ECE and the aims she found important.

We can see that the teacher interpreted that the cooperative formation of a social object took place. This social object seemed to be more durable; the teacher described her involvement with the project for the entire spring. However, it required that the teacher make it possible for children to act according to the inscription by providing the necessary equipment, such as the computer and her expertise in making the animations. She also states that the project went smoothly since it “fitted well in the everyday life of the group”. This constitutive social object did not collide with the existing regulative objects; therefore, its existence was possible.

The next excerpt aims to illuminate another necessary condition of keeping social objects alive. The teacher describes how a child remembered an imaginative character, Tom the Troll that had been part of the preschool group's activities during the last two years and began to discuss the character at the breakfast table in the preschool. The teacher had a plan of using storytelling cards with children on that day but he adjusted his plan since he saw an opportunity to merge the aim that he had in mind with the interests of children. He wrote a letter from Tom the Troll and placed it on a spot where the children could find it. In the letter Tom told the children that he had caught a cold and had nothing to do since he had read all his books already. He asked the children to write him some new stories.

Jake: The child's initiative did not really change the content but it was a sensible change; this use of the fifth dimension—imagination—has been kind of important to me. I think it was a meaningful moment [.] We have tried to keep this imaginative character alive the whole year. If it [Tom the Troll] is actively in the children's stories and plays, we would receive some kind of message from him or we would talk with him via Skype. It can be used in many activities and it is so motivating. Since it merges play, fantasy and reality, it is a fruitful way to inspire and motivate children. In fact, the character existed already last year and it kind of stayed. First we thought that it would stay in the fairy woods to live by himself and we would invent another character instead, but Tom the Troll remained strongly in children's stories, so we decided to keep the character since they were interested in it. . . . It was motivating to tell stories to the troll instead of just telling stories [to the children].

Although Tom the Troll was an adult invention, we consider it to be a cooperatively formed social object since the adults planned to abandon the character and it was

because of children's interest that they decided to keep him. The activity—telling stories to the Troll—was cooperatively formed although the aim was decided by the adult. The fact that the teacher adjusted his plan immediately (i.e., the plan possessed situational plasticity as in this episode) was crucial for the formation of the social object. In order to keep the social object, Tom the Troll, alive, inscriptions of him were made; they sent letters and Skype messages from him and thus upheld the troll's existence. This seems to be important especially in the situations where the social object is not part of the everyday routines.

In our data, there were examples in which a social object was not created even though a teacher thought that a child's suggestion was fulfilled. In one case, it was recorded in an individual ECE plan that a child suggested having a masquerade. It was agreed in the document that they could arrange one during the autumn. When we asked about the masquerade, the teacher told me that they had not had time to have the party during the Autumn, but they had one at the First of May, as that is a typical way of celebrating the holiday in Finnish preschools. The teacher felt that they had taken the child's suggestion into account, but we concluded that they had not formed a social object together with a child since, in that case, the masquerade took place over six months later than the suggestion was made and they would have had the requested event anyway, regardless of the child's suggestion. Therefore, the child's suggestion did not play a part in the planning and the child did not know that the masquerade was related to her wish. Adjusting a plan may mean that a change takes place right away as in the Tom the Troll example or the change is inscribed in the calendar or in the group's ECE plan. Although the plan to have a masquerade was inscribed in the individual ECE plan, its relation to other social objects, such as other plans and schedules was not defined.

Thus, it seems that a necessary condition for the formation of a social object is that its relations to other social objects are acknowledged and at least vaguely defined.

To ensure that mutual agreements were enacted, it was important that relations between co-formed social objects and other practices were taken into account. Defining and materializing relations either through immediate actions or by specific inscriptions enabled openings for democratic spaces. In the next section we will re-examine individual ECE plans in terms of equality.

### ***Whose perspectives count?***

In this section, we discuss whether focusing on constitutive and regulative objects in ECE plans may help us to reflect on equality in ECE. This is done by answering research questions 3 and 4: is there a connection between children's gender and the type of agreements made in their ECE plans and is there a connection between children's need for special care and the type of agreements made in their ECE plans. We will use both quantitative and qualitative data to address these questions.

Even though the number of agreements in which children's perspective played a role is scarce (380 agreements in total; 23 agreements were due to a child's opinion being taken into account), quantitative analyses of the data revealed that children's gender and the number of agreements where children's perspectives played a role were significantly associated. While in approximately every third girl's individual ECE plan there was an agreement in which the child's perspective had a direct role, the same number for boys was only 1:8. These findings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Association between child's gender and number of co-created social objects in ECE plans

Gender	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Mann Whitney U
Girls	44	.34	.479	.007
Boys	60	.13	.389	

In quantitative analyses we did not find any association between a need for special care ( $n=12$ ) and the formation of social objects in ECE plans (Need for special care  $M=.22$ ; no need for special care  $M=.25$ ;  $p=.75$ ). However, based on our qualitative analysis, we noted that in the ECE plans of special education children, all the agreements and aims that the children helped construct related to regulative objects. For example, it was agreed that the staff would be sensitive to a certain child's request for help and noticing the child's own ways of communicating since it was difficult for him to communicate verbally. Thus, they differed from other social objects created in cooperation with children without special needs and adults as most of them were constitutive in nature.

## Discussion

In this paper, we analysed the role of pedagogical documentation as a way to ensure that children's perspectives become a more central and acknowledged part of everyday life in preschool and examined whether the concepts of constitutive and regulative objects would be helpful in examining equality in ECE. Our results show that pedagogical documentation has a dual role in building a more participatory and equal ECE.

Our study demonstrates that the regulative objects in preschool are quite solid; it may not be easy to change them even with the help of participatory practices supported by pedagogical documentation. This notion resonates well with a discussion concerning the ambivalent nature of childhood and education: there is a simultaneous need for protection while maintaining a space for agency that has been ongoing for the last few decades (Rainio, 2008; Vandenbroek & Buverne-de-bie, 2006).

This study also sheds light on how children in general have more power in the formation of constitutive than regulative objects. This is not very surprising. It is clear that children have a larger part in defining the rules of play and constructing an imaginary character than in defining the staff's work shifts or hygiene regulations. However, we also noticed that teachers are able to facilitate the formation of social objects and keep them alive through pedagogical documentation that includes specific inscriptions for further actions in addition to or instead of mere descriptions. This is the first role of pedagogical documentation in building a more participatory and equal ECE.

Children with special needs were an exception in terms of the kinds of agreements that were made when their perspectives were taken into account. The agreements in their individual ECE plans where their perspective were explicitly taken into account were mainly related to regulative objects. This is interesting for at least two reasons: first, it indicated that the interests of special needs children guide the planning of the group's themes and play activities less than the interests of other children. In that sense it might be that preschool activities do not support their sense of agency (Kumpulainen, Lipponen, Hilppö & Mikkola, 2014; Rainio, 2008) and their democratic participation equally with other children. Secondly, since regulative objects are more solid and durable, they became changed more often when reflecting the perspectives of special needs children because it might be that teachers apply themselves more deeply into pedagogical thinking and rather than requiring special needs children to adapt, they aim to modify the setting more often than with other children.

Our results also demonstrate that while making individual ECE plans, girls' perspectives were taken into account more often than boys' were. These results show that our categorization helps us scrutinize equality in terms of participation. Scrutinizing ECE practices by using pedagogical documentation as a tool in this manner would help

to build more equal ECE in terms of participation. This is the second role of pedagogical documentation in building up a more participatory and equal ECE.

It may be interesting to consider whether the teachers work to keep the mutually created constitutive objects alive would change or revise the solid regulative objects if necessary. Our data did not allow this kind of examination; it is left for further inquiries to do so. Is it possible that a collaboratively formed constitutive object that a teacher helps keep alive by pedagogical documentation would enable examining and challenging these kinds of regulative objects?

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